

SUSSEX CHORUS AND SUSSEX SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
VERDI *REQUIEM*
St Bartholomew's church, Brighton
Saturday November 7th

MUSICAL FIREWORKS IN A MEMORABLE PERFORMANCE

The day before Remembrance Sunday, with fireworks were going off all around, was a supremely fitting day to perform Verdi's monumental *Requiem*. Here is a work of profound spirituality, which contemplates death and the afterlife in music which ranges from the quietest introspection to the most extrovert orchestral and choral pyrotechnics. Mark Andrew James, the conductor, was well served by his performers, who brought tremendous colour and immediacy to his fervent dramatisation.

His large orchestra produced a range of sounds from the most hushed string-tones of the opening Kyrie to the apocalyptic vision of the last trump, in which the brass enveloped the large audience with glorious tone from the concert platform and the west gallery. This approach to the work suited the wide open spaces of the church well, and frequently made the spine tingle.

A young quartet of soloists, each of whom are developing promising careers, responded well to the conductor's italianate, heart-on-sleeve, view of the work. Yvonne Howard (mezzo) was consistently impressive in her solos, and sang throughout with a rich steady tone, producing glorious full tone at both extremities of her voice. She was well partnered in duet by Catrin Aur Davis (soprano), who also saved her most thrilling and controlled singing for the final movement, *Libera me*. In this she was very ably partnered by the 140-strong Sussex Chorus, who had been singing confidently throughout. Here is a choir which has got the measure of the tricky St Barts acoustic, and knows how to get the music across, whether in the climactic moments or in the exquisite pianissimo moments for which the work is famous. Their singing was consistently unified in attack, their tone well blended, and they revealed a particularly alert tenor and bass section.

This memorable performance would have rejoiced the heart of its composer, who treated the sacred text with the same sense of drama that he brought to his operas. Indeed, the *Requiem* has often been regarded as his finest opera! The thunderous applause and ovation for this performance showed that the audience were in total agreement.

Rashid Karapiet